

To Kazakhstan and Back

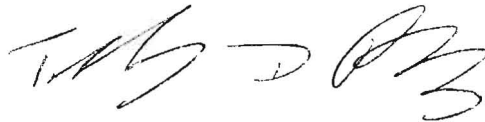
An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Timothy Berg', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ball State University

Muncie, Indiana

May 2011

Expected Date of Graduation

May 2011

Abstract

Many people from the United States take short term humanitarian trips around the world. Much is known about the tasks these individuals and delegations accomplish and the lives they improve through simple gifts such as a well to clean water, but often there is a profound emotional impact on the delegate that is overlooked. This documentary follows a small group of Americans to an orphanage in Kazakhstan, where their purpose is to conduct a fun and educational English camp for the orphans. The camera attempts to capture the experiences that emotionally affect the delegates the most and explore through interviews their motivations and how this experience has affected their personal life.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Timothy Berg for advising me on this thesis project. Not only did he trust me to travel around the world and bring thesis-worthy material back, Dr. Berg was a pivotal figure in my academic development at Ball State. I cannot express how his instruction has pushed me to dig a little deeper, search a little more, and find something truly worth saying.

I would like to thank all of the staff of Interlink stateside and in Kazakhstan including Jim Nelson and Barb Bullard who trusted in the vision I had and made possible my trip overseas.

I would like to thank all of the delegates who were part of the trip to Savva and their willingness to examine and open themselves in front of the camera.

I would especially like to thank Tony Hart for speaking from his heart and giving this project a backbone. He also was a great mental support while traveling and helped inspire me to finish this project.

Everybody who helped me raise financial support to travel to Kazakhstan deserves an equal share of recognition for this project. The trip would not have happened without you.

I would like to thank both of my parents for more than I will ever know. They raised me to chase after my dreams.

Author's Statement

Last summer, I traveled around the world to Kazakhstan with a non-profit humanitarian organization called Interlink Resources. This organization is involved with a variety of projects and initiatives that provide English education, medical services, and humanitarian aid to communities in Central Asia, but currently focus primarily on working to provide children living in orphanages better opportunities for a stable future. Interlink was founded and remains in Muncie, Indiana and partners with several other organizations from Oregon and Virginia. One of the most important and largest operations of this organization is sending delegations of American citizens overseas to provide English summer camp programs for various orphanages. The larger purpose of the English camp is to develop cross-cultural relationships, foster important life-skills in the children, and cultivate hope for their own future. Though, perhaps the most gain from these trips occurs within each delegate in ways that cannot be measured. This documentary attempts to find evidence of this.

I traveled with a delegation and took my video camera to document the group's journey. After spending two weeks overseas living in the Kazakh orphanage while the American group put on their summer English program and engaged with the children, some of whom were financially sponsored by Americans through Interlink, I witnessed each of the delegates experience self-proclaimed personal change. I used my camera to methodically capture each delegate navigating the foreign culture and come to terms with the reality of the children compared to their own affluent situations.

My project presents the effects a short-term overseas humanitarian trip have on an individual and the motivations involved in such an effort. This documentary draws from more than ten hours of video I gathered while in Kazakhstan.

This undertaking has already broadened my educational experience greatly by taking me into a different culture. Being a telecommunications major, this project has thus required a great knowledge of the camera and a proficiency in video production as well as organizational skills and journalistic discernment. Because I was traveling into a post-Communist country, I had to be a minimalist when deciding the equipment I would take because of the intense security and an automatic suspicion with cameras. Even though I could have used several light kits, a steadicam, a tripod, boom microphones, and a crew of production assistants, I challenged myself with the task of capturing everything with my Canon 7D DSLR camera and a monopod simply because I could not feasibly take everything else. I have always said that a truly good filmmaker can still make an inspiring and entertaining project regardless of the equipment available.

In the selection process of organizing the footage and assembling a structure for a compelling narrative to be told, my talents were stretched and further developed as I made interpretive decisions about how to present each character and setting to an audience with fairness. I actually had no way of planning a shooting schedule of events I wanted to capture for the documentary and further had limited control over what opportunities I could arrange to film. So, I did my best to give the documentary a general direction to focus on the delegates instead of the work they were doing necessarily.

Additionally, this venture presented a challenge to take complex and multi-faceted pieces of evidence and work out a developed assertion about the delegation's

experience that makes connections to larger social issues. Since I could not plan my documentary ahead of time, like most professional documentaries that have a narrative story arc written before they ever shoot any video footage, I had to strive to capture everything possible while I was in country because I only had one shot at getting everything I needed. The challenge after returning to the United States was finding the strongest story from the footage I had gathered in Kazakhstan and constructing a compelling and logical storyline. This took countless hours of pouring over the interview footage and trying to find themes, but then being able to support what is said in the interview with other video that I took.

This documentary is directed mainly towards audiences that have traveled on a short term humanitarian trip or who are considering it. I hope to emphasize to the audience the personal benefits and gain involved in engaging in a global humanitarian effort, but also to present an intimate experience with a different culture that the viewer might not have encountered in an effort to foster broader perspectives and greater understanding about the global community. For those who have already participated on a similar trip, I hope that they can identify with the characters in my documentary and will be able to better process their own experiences from having watched someone else go through the journey.

The motivation to make this film came from making a trip with Interlink to Kazakhstan as a delegate the summer after my first year of college. That trip was the first time I had ever left the United States' borders and had a profound impact on my life in more ways than can be said. As a filmmaker, I found my own experience to be a worthy story and decided to capture it in somebody else. This completed project is the realization

of a goal I set over two years ago, to travel across the world and find a story that had changed my life and would hopefully do the same for others.

IRB Research Proposal

SECTION 1 – TITLE, PURPOSE OF THE STUDY, AND RATIONALE

- 1.1 Title:** Interlink in Kazakhstan.
- 1.2 Purpose:** To examine the international relationships between American Interlink workers and Kazakhstan nationals, providing a case study of international humanitarian efforts and their overall positive effect on the global society and human relations.
- 1.3 Rationale.** This project will provide an intimate video documentary of the effects of humanitarian efforts internationally.

SECTION 2 – DESCRIPTION OF SUBJECT POPULATION

- 2.1 Number of subjects.** There are 14 American delegates traveling to Kazakhstan, 5 American Interlink employees, 10 Kazakh Interlink employees, approximately 200 Savva Orphanage employees and 160 children, small number of students visiting orphanage.
- 2.2 Describe the subject population.** Primarily Russian and Kazakh ethnicities, all Kazakh citizens 4-22 years old male and female; and the American Interlink workers, male and female, ages 20-60 years old. These guidelines merely indicate the possible subject population, which do not limit the population in any way. The children will be included to accurately record the firsthand effects of the Americans helping at the orphanage
- 2.3 Describe any specified inclusion/exclusion criteria.** The orphanage director will be consulted to determine which orphans are willing to participate in an interview. All willing American workers will be asked to volunteer to participate. No other inclusion or exclusion criteria will be used.

SECTION 3 – SUBJECT RECRUITMENT

- 3.1 Describe the method of subject recruitment.** The child subjects residing at the orphanage will be suggested by the orphanage director for specific interviews. Otherwise with the American workers, individual permission will be asked for verbally.

SECTION 4 – METHODS AND PROCEDURES

- 4.1 Describe the methods and procedures to be used.** Subjects will participate in answering conversational informal questions in front of a camera in a low pressure environment where the subject is not obligated to continue at any time.

The interviews will be conducted in a journalistic style, with a general common structure of questions.

SECTION 5 – ANONYMITY/CONFIDENTIALITY OF DATA

5.1 Describe how data will be collected and stored.

The data will be recorded on video and audio in conjunction with written or typed notes stored on several electronic hard drives. Once all data is recorded, it will be used to edit together a narrative video documentary. All of the data will be retained by Interlink and the primary investigator indefinitely.

All data will not be anonymous and the provisions for maintaining the privacy and confidentiality of the subject and data will be determined by Interlink after all data is recorded.

SECTION 6 – POTENTIAL RISKS AND BENEFITS

6.1 Describe the potential risks and discomforts. The most risk or discomfort would occur during an interview only if the subject became emotionally uncomfortable with the questions, which is not likely due to the casual nature of the interview questions.

6.2 Describe how the risks will be minimized. To minimize risk or discomfort, the subject will be informed that he or she are not obligated to continue at any time during the interview.

6.3 Describe the potential benefits. The potential benefits of making a documentary to spread knowledge of the effects of international humanitarian work could include increased support for the Kazakh community because of raised awareness and enthusiasm to help the community.

SECTION 7 – SUBJECT INCENTIVES/INDUCEMENTS TO PARTICIPATE

7.1 Describe any inducements/incentives to participate that will be offered to the subject. No incentives or inducements will be offered to subjects.

SECTION 8 – OTHER FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 Describe any financial expense to the subject. Travel and living expenses to the country for the primary investigator and the American workers from Interlink have been raised through donations.

8.2 Describe any provisions for compensation for research-related injury.
Not applicable

SECTION 9 – INFORMED CONSENT

- 9.1** **Process of obtaining informed consent.** Not applicable.
- 9.2** **Waived Elements.** Not applicable.
- 9.3** The subjects will be informed of the nature of the video to show people what it is like to help in Kazakhstan. Information, name and age, will be taken to reference later for the video. All the subjects will be informed properly or what the project is, why they are being video taped, and what it will be used for verbally. Because most of the subject are orphans at an institution, only the director of the orphanage will be provided with written documentation of the project.

SECTION 10 – ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

- 10.1** List all attachments related to or referenced in this narrative.
Not applicable.